DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 198 223 UD 021 212

AUTHOR McClain, Shirla R.; And Others
TITLE Standard English: A Prerequisite for Professional Careers.
PUB DATE Nov 79
NOTE 16p.; Not available in paper copy due to author's restriction. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Urban Education Association (Detroit, MI, November, 1979).

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Employment Opportunities; *Employment Qualifications; *English Instruction; Higher Education; *Job Skills; Language Handicaps; *Language Standardization; *Nonstandard Dialects; Oral Language; Pattern Drills (Language); *Professional Occupations; Substitution Drills

ABSTRACT

Because many urban youth have grown up in communities where only nonstandard English is spoken, and because schools lack programming to teach standard English, these youth frequently graduate from high school without acquiring communication skills necessary for professional careers. Prospective employers tend to associate certain dialects with specific social statuses. In studies designed to measure the effect of attitudes toward language in hiring decisions, speakers of nonstandard English fared poorly. Notions that nonstandard English is the product of low intelligence, poor education, or faulty hearing, however, are misconceptions. Research evidence verifies the historical origins of nonstandard English and documents its legitimacy as a language system. In order to enable speakers of nonstandard English to participate equally in educational and social opportunities, however, educators should make an effort to teach standard English to these speakers. Strategies to develop oral language skills of young children should focus on experiences that encourage spontaneous responses. Strategies for upper elementary and secondary grades should incorporate an interdisciplinary approach, and oral drills at the secordary level should be increasingly complex. (Author/APM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

JAN 19 1981

ED198223

STANDARD ENGLISH: A PREREQUISITE FOR PROFESSIONAL CAREERS

Shirla R. McClain
Kent State University

Norma L. Spencer
University of Akron

Barbara G. Bowman
Kent State University

Paper presented at the National Urban Education Association's annual meeting. Detroit, Michigan. November, 1979.

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Shirla R. McClain

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

UD021212

Because many urban youth have grown up in communities where only non-standard English (NSE) is spoken, and because schools have not offered curricular programming to effectively teach standard English (SE) to such students, these youth frequently graduate from high school without acquiring the SE communication skills that are prerequisite to professional careers. Disproportionate numbers of these students are low income and/or minorities and according to employment figures are underrepresented in the professions.

For example, according to the 1970 census, the central cities of the nation's metropolitan areas contain approximately three tenths of all United States employment. While a higher proportion of Blacks were in the urban labor force, only 20 percent of minorities were in professional and technical jobs. On the other hand, the white employment pattern indicated that 56 percent of white Americans were in white collar positions.

Not only are Blacks and other minorities underrepresented in the professional careers, conversely they are overrepresented in the unemployment figures. In central cities, the unemployment rate for Blacks and other minorities was 8.3 compared to 4.9 percent for whites.

Over ten years ago, Newman (1968) hypothesized that the cause of the high unemployment in urban areas was because the jobs created were of a highly skilled, white-collar "professional"

nature for which central city residents did not have the training to compete successfully. Moreover, Black workers in the city were relatively young and often lacked appropriate skills or education for the many available jobs.

A study by Fremon (1970) two years later suggested that the persistence of unemployment was not entirely due to the unavailability of skilled/trained persons, but was attributed largely to discriminatory employment practices. While much has been done, in more recent years, through affirmative action programs to eliminate such job discrimination, the feelings and findings of both Newman and Fremon continue to be reflected today.

Because professional jobs in particular, are generally built upon one's competence in SE, urban youth continue to become frustrated and depressed when they pursue professional careers and find they are ill-prepared in terms of having acquired the necessary language skills. For example, many low income urban youth find it difficult to fit into the world of announcers, managers, sales people, administrators, secretaries, teachers, etc. Too many such youth lack the qualifications that these professional jobs demand: the ability to read with speed and comprehension and the ability to communicate orally with the public in a variety of settings requiring the mastery of standard English.

Although linguists purport that "all varieties of language are equally valid systems of communication, and are therefore equally deserving of respect" (Abrahams, Troike, 1972), listeners

tend to associate certain dialects with specific social status. Since some dialects serve to elicit stereotyped, negative impressions, the importance of speaking SE cannot be overemphasized. The implications for professional careers is clear: There is practically no profession that does not in some way rely upon written and/or job-entry screening--either in the form of screening tests or interviews.

Hopper (1977) in Austin, Texas found that attitudes toward language do influence hiring decisions. In his study, 105 employment interviewers were asked to rate potential employees on the basis of a taped interview and a simulated data sheet description of the applicant's qualifications for a particular position (sales, supervision, technical). They then rated the probability that the applicant would be hired for the position.

Speakers of non-standard dialect fared badly in all three job categories. Findings were contrary to the expectation that non-standard speech would be troublesome for sales and supervision but not for technical positions. Of the 105 employment interviewers in the study, 54 indicated that speech is quite important (6 or 7 on a 7 point scale); 25 rated it as moderately important (5 on a 7 point scale); and 26 rated it as relatively unimportant (1-4 on a 7 point scale).

Stevens (1972) reports that job seeking behavior of many job applicants prevent them from obtaining jobs for which they

have the skills. He notes that some applicants do not receive job offers because during the interview they are unable to adequately express the type of jobs desired and their job goals--if not unrealistic, they were ofttimes vague. In some cases, this was attributed to the applicants' lack of consistent verbal communication and articulate expression.

This lack of fluency in SE has proven to be restrictive to NSE speakers academically, socially, vocationally, and economically. Persons who do not speak SE generally have not performed well in school. Poor academic performance sets the stage for limited occupational choices. Limited occupational choices restrict economic opportunity which in turn hinders social mobility.

Because of the pervasive effect of SE acquisition on the many facets of a person's life, those who speak only NSE must be empowered with SE. Before this can occur however, effective curricular programming to teach SE to NSE speakers must become a reality. A necessary first step in this direction is to understand the nature of NSE.

The Nature of Non-standard

Historically, language has been used as an indicant of one's "station in life". Excluding racial and/or socioeconomic class considerations, persons skilled in the use of standard English (SE) have always been deemed superior to those who have not had command of the language. Many of those unskilled in the use of SE have

spoken, and continue to speak, non-standard English (NSE). Two readily identifiable groups who speak distinct variations of NSE are Blacks and Appalachians. Both NS usage and its users have been viewed as deficient rather than different.

For the past two decades, language, skin color, and socio-economic class have undergone a re-appraisal. Linguists, psychol-cgists, and educators, after studying the nature of non-standard speech patterns have documented the legitimacy of NSE as a different language system.

Despite the preponderance of literature that indicates that NSE is not an inferior SE, many educators--and the public at large--continue to view it as such. Moreover, other false notions abound.

One notion assumes that NSE is the result of low intelligence; another, that NSE is the language spoken by the poorly educated. Both views are fraught with misconceptions. For example, since disproportionate numbers of NS speakers (both Appalachians and Blacks) score low on IQ tests, the cultural bias in standardized tests must be considered.

In regard to the notion that NSE is the language of persons whose education has been of poor quality, it is important to understand that highly competent persons who are well qualified in their fields may on occasion manifest some NS characteristics in their speech. Language patterns learned early and repeated daily are not easily altered--especially when systematic curri-

cular programs designed to make persons bidialictal have yet to be created/implemented.

Other misconceptions focus upon actual speech production. One assumes that NSE is the result of faulty hearing, i.e., that NS speakers have auditory discrimination problems. A second misconception equates NSE with immature or developing speech. Both notions are erroneous in that NS speakers reproduce sounds that they hear and the language that they learn in precisely the same manner that SE speakers acquire--receive and express--their language. Thus, unless NS speaking children are hearing impaired during their language learning years, they will not have auditory discrimination problems that affect their speech. Similarly, unless speech impairment is present, the NS speaker's ability to reproduce sounds will mature in the same developmental pattern as that of the SE speaker. Thus, students who speak NSE and whose physical development is normal, do not need speech or hearing therapy. Rather, they require teachers who know how to use non-standard speech as a basis for instruction in SE.

Two other misconceptions regarding NSE relate to choice of language used. One misconception is that NSE speakers have, in fact, internalized SE but <u>choose</u> to use NSE; they are simply careless in their choice of words. Persons who make such contentions do not comprehend the nature of NSE. Nor do they understand that many NS speakers have internalized only NSE, are not bidialectal,

and therefore have no choice as to which dialect (SE or NSE) they speak.

Finally, NSE is not slang. Slang--a "created" vocabulary--is purposefully substituted for standard vocabulary, is continually changing, and is understood by a particular group of individuals (Spencer and McClain).

The misconceptions having been explained, it is important to state then, what NS is. Research evidence verifies the historical origins of NSE and documents its legitimacy as a language system. Like SE, it is systematic in structure, but differs from SE in phonology, grammar, and vocabulary. Descriptions of NS patterns specify these differences.

Once ducators are aware of the nature of non-standard English, they can begin to use strategies that will teach SE to NSE speakers based on their NS patterns.

Strategies for Teaching SE

Primary Strategies

Strategies to develop oral language skills of young children should focus on experiences that encourage spontaneous responses. Such experiences incluse picture reading, puppetry, and creative dramatics. Experiences that encourage SE responses are also appropriate. However, the "product" (SE responses) must not become more important than the "process." (eliciting oral responses)

Appropriate experiences include choral speaking, activities

that require children to speak in complete sentences, listening and discrimination exercises to identify similar and different words/phrases, word games, and vocabulary building exercises.

Because young children tend to have built-in enthusiasm, the school environment itself provides a real-life setting in which they may apply oral language skills.

Upper Elementary Strategies

Because development of communication skills is esential to all subject areas, it is recommended that strategies for upper elementary and secondary grades incorporate an interdisciplinary approach. Appropriate strategies for the upper elementary or middle grades include oral practice drills, other oral language activities, games, and written activities.

Oral drills used extensively by foreign language teachers are also appropriate for teaching SE to NS speakers. However, some adaptation in procedure and methodolgy is required.

First, an assessment process is necessary before oral drills can be used with NS speakers. Students' NS patterns must be identified before drills can be structured. One method of assessment is to tape record students' responses to picture reading or other spontaneous verbalization, transcribe responses, (verbatim) and tabulate the NS patterns used by each student. In this manner, both individual and group assessment are possible. Drills can then be structured to meet the common needs of students, as well as to

meet individual needs. For example, it is likely that substitution of "d" for the voiced "th" in the initial position will emerge as an NS pattern of a number of students, while substitution of "v" for "th" in the medial position may be verbalized by only a few.

Second, in using oral drills with NS speakers, it is essential that emphasis be given only to gross deviations from SE. Therefore, the use of who vs whom, "a" vs "an", using prepositions at the end of a sentence, etc., are not appropriate, particularly in the early stages of practice. It is also essential that drills focus on only one deviation at a time rather than on several. For example, drills to practice voiced "th" in the initial position should not be designed to practice "th" in the medial position.

Finally, because of their repetitious nature, oral drills must be carefully structured to avoid boredom. It is recommended that drills be relevant and personalized as much as possible. Utilizing students' names and activities of interest to them is one way of doing this. For example, a drill designed to focus on noun-verb agreement might include: Tanya likes music, Jerome likes football, They like bar-be-que.

The following are examples of appropriate pattern drills. Contrast drills. These drills are designed to help students to distinguish between standard and NS grammar or phonology. Pairs of sentences or words are presented to students. They must respond

by indicating that the pairs are either the same, or different.

A contrast drill dealing with grammar might be:

Teacher: Rhonda walks home - Rhonda walks home

Students: same

Teacher: Sonny ride home - Sonny rides home

Students: different

A phonology drill might include:

Teacher: mass-mask

Student: different

Teacher: test-test

Student: same

Substitution drills. These drills require that students substitute a word or words according to the teacher's cue. For example,

Teacher: Henry plays the guitar

Student: Henry plays the guitar

Teacher: Scott

Student: Scott plays the guitar

More challenging drills include verb substitution; (Teacher: T.J. works on Saturday, Students: T.J. works on Saturday, Teacher: sleeps, Students: T.J. sleeps on Saturday) determining where to substitute new words; (Teacher: He jogs to school, Students: He jogs to school, Teacher: Willie Earl, Students: Willie Earl jogs to school)

Transformation drills. Students must change verb tenses in these

drills. For example, Teacher: He eats breakfast, Students: He ate breakfast.

Question transformation requires that students change a statement to its question form. For example, Teacher: He dances the Hulk, Students: Does he dance the Hulk?

Examples of other oral language activities include choral speaking, role playing and simulations, and vocabulary building exercises. Using students' NS slang vocabularies is an extremely effective method to build SE skills.

Written activities must provide visual cues which readily illustrate the difference between standard and NS items.

Real-life experiences for upper elementary students include announcements or advertising of school club activities, public address announcements and adaptation of activities suggested for secondary grades.

Secondary Strategies

More complex oral drills are practiced at the secondary level. Students practice substitution and transformation drills of several types to learn and reinforce SE phonology and grammar.

Beyond oral drills, secondary students can be motivated to apply newly acquired skills by translating NS lyrics from popular records into SE. Discussions can focus on the differences in the intonation, rhythm, and rhyme as well as the differences in the phonology and grammar of the two systems.

Vocabulary exercises can emphasize how socially inappropriate communication can be changed to courteous, socially acceptable language. For example, students can suggest as many ways as possible to say "sit down and be quiet, what do you want?, etc." in diplomatic, tactful, socially acceptable terms. Two sample lessons are included. (See Table 1)

An activity that is particulary meaningful and relevant to secondary students is for them to tape (audio or video) a simulated job interview. Working in pairs, students role play a professional job interview and then listen to identify NS grammatical, phonological and vocabulary patterns. Once the students have analyzed the extent and frequency of these patterns, they then translate them into SE.

Real-life experiences include speeches, dramatizations, debates, broadcasting and other school-related activities that require oral language activities.

Conclusions

Because the effects of speaking -- or not speaking -- SE are so pervasive, the strategies to teach SE to NSE speakers are important to all educational personnel -- professional and non-professional. School-wide efforts to teach SE are necessary then in order to maintain a heightened awareness of the importance of SE acquisition. Such a concentrated effort can be a significant factor in determining whether or not students from homes

where NS is spoken will choose to pursue professional careers. Any less effort may continue to limit their choices significantly.

References

Abrahams, Roger and Rudolph Troike. Language and Cultural Diversity in American Education. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972.

Fremon, Charlotte. The Occupational Patterns in Urban Employment Change, 1965-67 (Working Paper) The Urban Institute, Washington, D.C. January, 1970. As cited in Gellner.

Gellner, Christopher. Occupational Characteristics of Urban Workers. Monthly Labor Review, October, 1971, pp. 144-155.

Hopper, Robert. Language Attitudes in the Employment Interview. Communication Monographs. 44, November, 1977, pp. 346-351.

Newman, Dorothy K. Decentralization of Jobs. Monthly Labor Review. May, 1968, pp. 16-28.

Spencer, Norma L. and McClain, Shirla R. "Essential Understandings, Rationale and Objectives for Teaching Standard English" in Multicultural Education: Preparing Educators to Provide Educational Equity. Washington, D.C. American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1979 (in press).

Stevens, Nancy D. The Effects of Job-Seeking Behavior on Obtaining a Job. Journal of College Placement, 32, April-May, 1972, pp. 46-50.